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INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0140
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3262
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1162
RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 0161
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 013328

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR CALLS ON FORMER PRESIDENT HABIBIE

JAKARTA 00013328 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Classified By: Ambassador B. Lynn Pascoe, REASONS 1.4 (B)
) AND (D).

SUMMARY

1. (C) On November 27 the Ambassador met with former President B.J. Habibie at his residence in suburban Jakarta. Looking relaxed and displaying characteristic energy and enthusiasm, the former President declared President Bush's November 20 visit a success, discussed his recently released memoirs, underscored the importance of combating the radical forces of Islam, and shared his plans for using the Association of the Indonesian Islamic Intellectuals (ICMI) as a vehicle to spread tolerance in Indonesia. End Summary.

HABIBIE'S THOUGHTS ON THE BUSH VISIT

2. (C) The Ambassador thanked the former President for his outspoken public support for President Bush's November 20 visit to Indonesia (Note: In the build up to President Bush's visit, former President Habibie was one of a handful of political luminaries to publicly support the President's visit and counteract widespread criticism. End Note). Habibie characterized the visit as "short, but efficient," and pointed to the agreements on economic and scientific assistance as evidence of a growing friendship between Indonesia and the United States and President Bush's genuine concern for the welfare of the Indonesian people.

3. (C) Habibie seconded President Bush's public comments that the demonstrations "were a sign of a healthy democracy." Habibie offered that the demonstrations were quite modest by Indonesian standards and agreed with the Ambassador's assessment that the international media exaggerated their size and scope.

4. (C) The former President expressed appreciation for the Ambassador's readout of the highlights of the visit, and then stressed his belief that Indonesia had an important global role. Habibie noted that the United States, as a majority Christian nation, and India, as a majority Hindu nation, had demonstrated the compatibility of Christianity and Hinduism with democracy; Indonesia, he asserted, would have to work hard to consolidate democracy and demonstrate that democracy could also take root in a majority Islamic country.

15. (C) The former President was pleased with the success of his newly released book, "Decisive Moments." He smiled with satisfaction when the Ambassador commented on the controversy surrounding the book, which claimed, among other things, that Suharto's son-in-law - then Lieutenant General Prabowo Subianto - planned to overthrow Habibie the day after he was sworn in as President. Habibie said that the first 5000 books sold out in one week, that the second tranche of 40,000 was gone after a month, and that the publisher then printed another 100,000 copies. Habibie reported that Prabowo asked for a meeting to discuss the book's accusations. He turned down Prabowo's request by telling him that "he should read the book because it's all in there." Habibie added that he then told Prabowo he only reported 70% of what he knew in the book, and that he could expect a sequel.

FIGHTING THE FORCES OF RADICAL ISLAM...WITH ICMI

16. (C) Habibie talked passionately and theatrically about his plans to use ICMI as a bulwark against radicalism. Habibie claimed that 80% of the current cabinet members and a vast majority of Indonesia's parliamentarians were members of ICMI. He argued that the organization was apolitical, a claim that he said could not be made by either NU or Muhammadiyah.

17. (C) Habibie briefly recounted his historical role as a co-founder of ICMI and noted that he currently serves as the Chairman of ICMI's Honorary Council. He said that he had traveled throughout Indonesia to visit pesantren and counter the forces of extremism. He enthusiastically recalled a visit he made to a Christian pesantren in Sumatera at then

JAKARTA 00013328 002.2 OF 002

Minister T.B. Silalahi's request to be become the school's "Godfather." He donated a large number of books to the school and subsequently took Silalahi to a Muslim pesantren in Aceh as a sort of quid pro quo. Habibie added that he was currently attempting to revise ICMI's by-laws so that Christians could become members as well.

18. (C) Habibie told the Ambassador he felt compelled to continue his pesantren outreach because of his desire "to give the next generation of Indonesians vision." Habibie worried about the Taliban-like influence present throughout Indonesia's pesantren and expressed a belief that ICMI and its dedicated cadres would continue work to counterbalance the threat.

COMMENT

19. (C) Habibie clearly relishes the splash that his new book has made, as well as the newfound, if short-lived, celebrity that has accompanied it. The former President consistently says all the right things about democracy, tolerance, and liberal Islam, but his star has long since dimmed and he retains only limited influence to advance his progressive agenda for Indonesia through ICMI and his well regarded Habibie Center think tank.
PASCOE